

Impact of social media on mainstream journalism in Ghana

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Abstract - The study looked at how social media impact mainstream journalism. It also determined the benefits and drawbacks of social media for mainstream journalism. 200 journalists were chosen at random from the Sunyani Municipality in the Bono region of Ghana using a purposive sampling technique for a phone and in-person interview to gather data. It was discovered, among other things, that all the respondents (i.e., 100%) believed that social media have positive impact on mainstream journalism, while most of the respondents (i.e., 80%) believed that social media have negative impact on mainstream journalism. As a result, it was suggested, among other things, that journalists use social media carefully to preserve the public's trust in the media.

Keywords: social media; mainstream journalism; impact; journalism

I. INTRODUCTION

Social media are now important participants in the media industry. The aftermath of the Iranian elections in 2009, according to Newman (2009), was the most recent illustration of how potent new online technologies like YouTube, Facebook, and X (Twitter) are changing the way media is generated, disseminated and consumed. He noted that while a new genre of opinionated blogging is altering the boundaries of journalism itself, user-generated images or videos continue to dominate television news and newspaper front pages. Furthermore, Hermida (2012; Hermida et al., 2012; Hermida et al., 2013) claimed that people who were documenting news events on social media took some of the iconic pictures of journalism in the twenty-first century. Hermida (2012 et al., cf. Schober et al., 2016) asserts that media has evolved into a shared space between journalists and the general public, starting with the shaky cellphone footage of the July 2005 London bombings, moving through the 2009 X (Twitter) photo of the airliner in the Hudson River, and ending with the YouTube films of the protests in Egypt in 2011. For instance, The Digital News Report (2023) discovered that Facebook is still one of the most popular social networks. However, as its emphasis changes away from news, its influence on journalism is rapidly declining.

According to Sakaki et al (2010), social media has strengthened the value of the public to the media as both news sources and news sensors. They observed that X (Twitter) users have evolved into social news sensors for rapidly growing breaking news events like natural disasters. According to Cage et al (2022), Elon Musk attempted to buy X (Twitter) in April 2022 because he believed that X needed to be changed privately. They allege that Musk said he wants to bring back free speech on X. They highlighted that since then, many have correctly pointed out that Musk's track record when it comes to free expression is, to put it mildly, problematic. However, they insisted that there is still

another factor that might make Musk's purchase of X dangerous for democracy: by holding control of X, the self-described "free speech absolutist" will also have an impact on the news agenda.

Williams et al (2011) claimed that news organizations place the highest priority on audience participation in the immediate aftermath of significant events like terrorist attacks or extreme weather that have a significant influence on the general public. However, it is possible that the reliance on audience content will decrease after journalists have reached the afflicted areas. Bruno (2011) found what he referred to as an "opportunistic model" while looking into the coverage of the Haitian earthquake. The Guardian, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), and Cable News Network (CNN), according to Bruno, barely used audience content when they had correspondents on the ground a week after the catastrophe despite using social media extensively. The use of social media by CNN in their news coverage decreased from 64% to 4%, which is the most notable change. Bruno claimed that traditional media will need to radically restructure their operational structures in order to move beyond such an "opportunistic" strategy.

Hermida (2012) asserted that social media affect both the pace of breaking news and the information flow during significant incidents. The report claims that speed has always been a factor in news production, whether it be rushing to meet a publication deadline or get a show on the air, or rushing to break the news first or get the upper hand on a competitor. The study also found that the advent of 24-hour news channels and the internet has accelerated the velocity of news, ushering in a shift to an unbroken news cycle. Furthermore, the study stated that the technological revolution brought on by the immediacy of social media services has greatly boosted, if not accelerated, the speed at which news moves.

Many people, according to Cage et al (2022), think that X (Twitter) influences publishers' editorial and production choices. Singer (1996) asserted, however, that the issue has become unusually worse in the internet age. Once more, Singer argued that because social media platforms focus on gossip, rumours, phony identities, and e-commercial activities, they disregard the foundation of the profession and trample on its goals and standards.

In their area of work nowadays, the majority of US journalists use social media platforms. They acknowledge that social media are helpful for many reporting duties. However, the majority of them think social media generally have a bad impact on journalism. In fact, according to Pew Research, one-third of them reported being harassed by someone outside of their organization. 67 percent of the journalists surveyed said that social media have a very unfavourable or only somewhat positive impact on US journalism. However, 1 in 5 of them (i.e., 18%) claimed that social media have a favourable impact on journalism, but just 2% claimed that this impact is extremely positive (Anonymous, 2023).

According to Frimpong (2016), the Graphic Communications Group Limited (GCGL) and the majority of Graphic journalists (94.3%) heavily rely on social media as an essential component of their newsgathering procedures. However, more than half of journalists (57.9%) think social media will have a negative impact on mainstream journalism. The majority of them (82.6%) also stated that gatekeeping is impacted by social media. In addition, according to Cision (2011), the usage of social media by UK journalists is now a common practice, despite some of them having expressed concern about how it would affect the caliber of their work. According to the survey, 97% of UK journalists regularly use social media as one of a variety of channels to find sources, confirm information, keep track of projects, and post finished products. Moreover, Hedman and Djerf-Perre (2013) noted that audiences may view the actions of social media-savvy journalists as a sign of unprofessionalism because they frequently break conventional conventions.

Furthermore, Apuke (2016) asserted that it is impossible to overlook the impact that social media have had recently on communication, particularly in journalism. He asserts that social media have unquestionably changed how journalists operate and how news is generated and disseminated. Besides, he noted that social media had unquestionably good effects. He argued that there are still worries about how they affect productivity, notably how they affect journalists' work schedules.

Additionally, he claimed that social media have made journalists more dependent on them and that many of them are unable to function without them. According to the Oriella Digital Journalism Study (2012), journalists' perceptions of the accessibility of their stories are also being impacted by social media. Once more, it was mentioned that in the US, the amount of views, comments, likes, and retweets an article obtains on social media platforms has become a common indicator of a journalist's success.

According to Newman et al (2012), Twitter and Facebook were the focus of the majority of mainstream media organizations' efforts in the UK. They discovered that those who used social media networks were significantly more likely than people who did not use social media to visit websites via links that others had forwarded to them from the internet. In addition, Farhi (2009; Lee et al.,) asserted that media companies adopted social media because of how quickly and concisely they can disseminate scoops and breaking news to readers who are familiar with Twitter. Farhi (2009) claims that when news is changing quickly, the medium is useful for spreading it. Furthermore, practically all sports writers utilize X (Twitter) to broadcast information about breaking events, promote their work, and communicate with audiences, according to Schultz and Shefter (2010, p. 233).

Opinions about the impact of social media on mainstream journalism have been discussed in numerous researches. However, the body of available research indicates that a few studies about the impact of social media on mainstream journalism in Ghana have been carried out. As a result, the presents study aims to close the gap.

II. METHOD

The study looked at how social media impact mainstream journalism. Purposive sampling was utilized to pick 200 journalists at random from the Sunyani Municipality in the Bono region of Ghana for in-person and phone interviews in order to collect data for the exploratory and qualitative nature of the study. First, whether or not the respondents have social media accounts was probed. Second, the kind of social media accounts they have were questioned.

In addition, the frequency of their visits to their social media sites was questioned. They were also probed about their preferred social media platforms. Furthermore, they were questioned about the rationale for their preferred social media platform.

They were also questioned on how successfully they use social media in their reporting. They were as well questioned if they believed social media have impact on mainstream journalism. They were once more asked to explain how and why they believed social media have affected mainstream journalism.

The next question was if they believed social media have good impact on mainstream journalism. They were also asked to explain why they believed social media have a good impact on mainstream journalism. They were also questioned about whether they believed social media have negative impact on mainstream journalism.

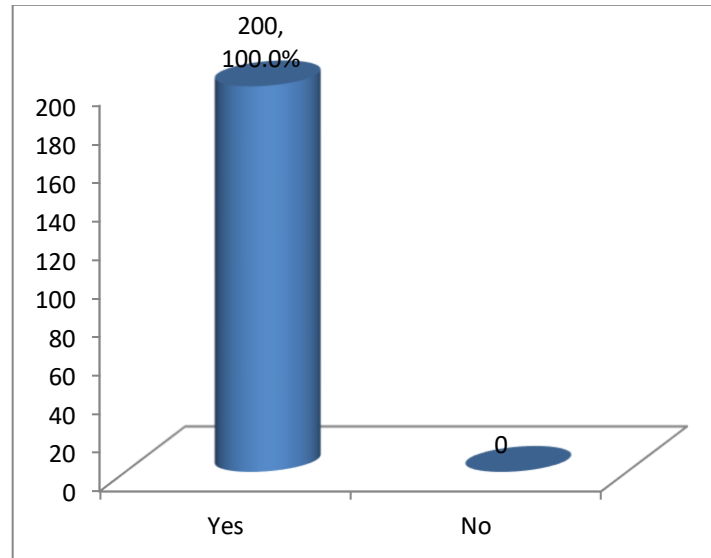
Finally, they were asked to explain why they believed social media have detrimental impact on mainstream journalism. The researcher was able to obtain rich and extensive information from the respondents thanks to the interview method of data collection. In addition, it made it possible for the researcher to build a relationship of trust and rapport with the respondents, improving the data's quality and richness. Furthermore, it gave the researcher the chance to follow up on questions and explain the responses of the respondents, which increased the validity and dependability of the data.

What is more, it made it possible for the researcher to modify and tweak the questions so that they were relevant to the wants and interests of the respondents, which improved the usefulness and relevance of the data. Excel was used to examine the data. While graphs were used to illustrate the data, each respondent's responses were written down and identified with a research identifier.

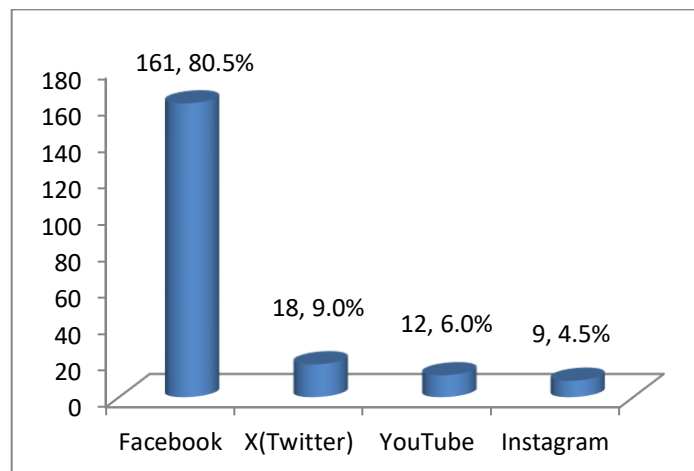
3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

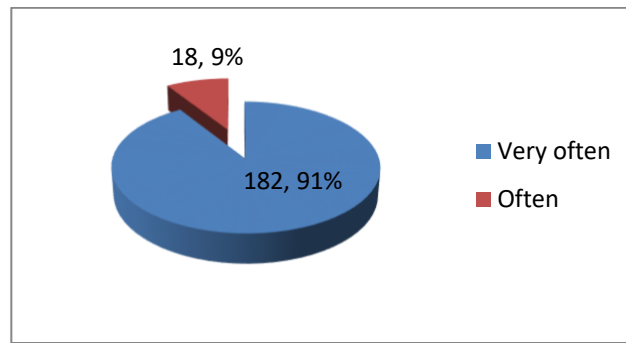
Do you have social media account?



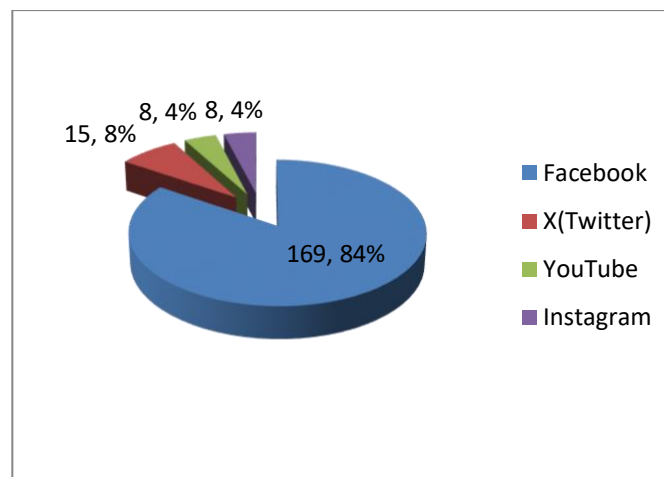
What type of social media account do you have?



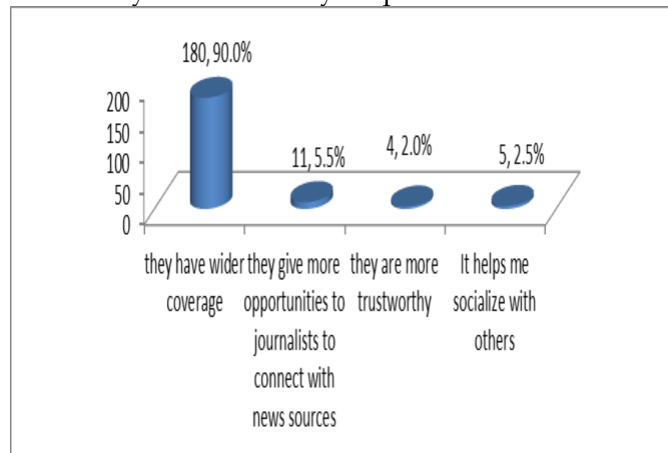
How often do you visit your social media account?



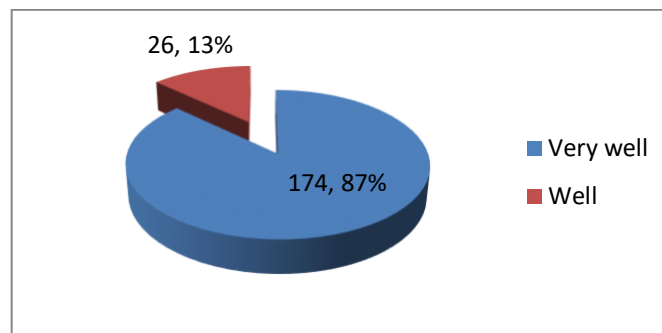
What of type of social media account do you prefer?



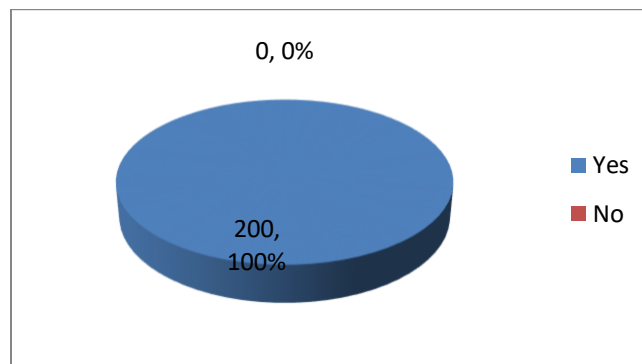
What is your reason for your preferred social media?



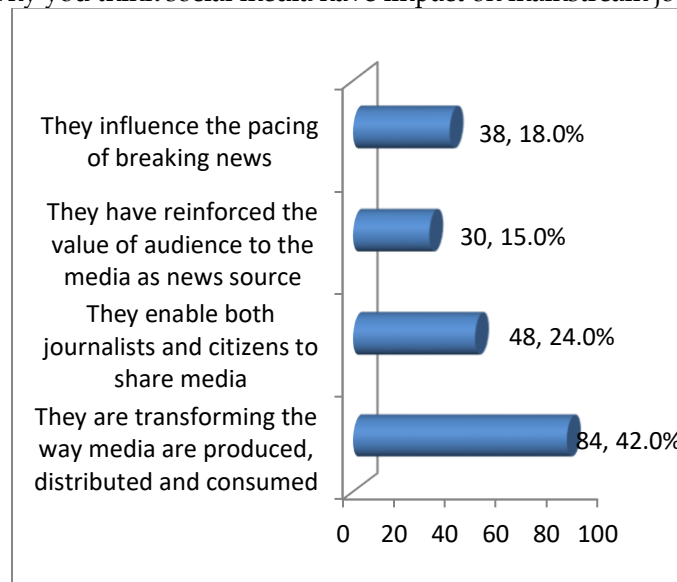
How have social media enhanced your work as a journalist?



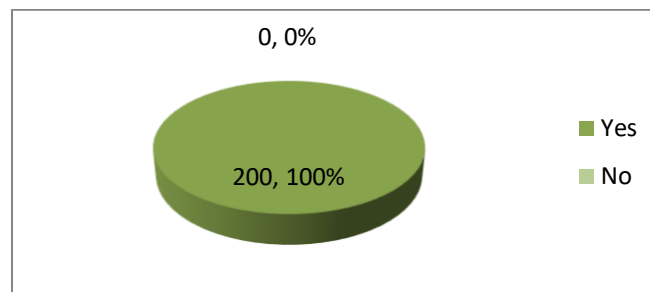
Do you think social media have impact on mainstream journalism?



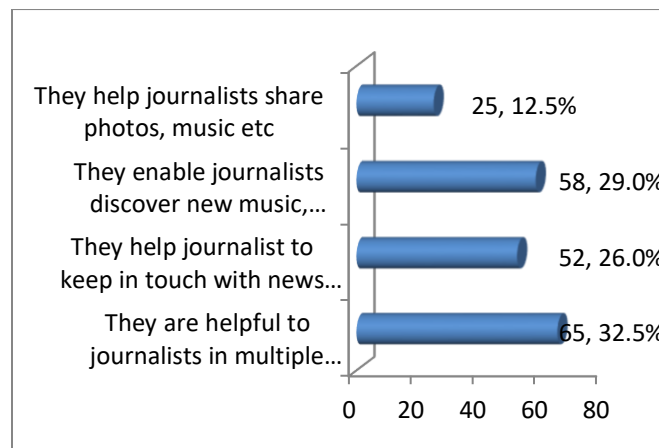
State why you think social media have impact on mainstream journalism



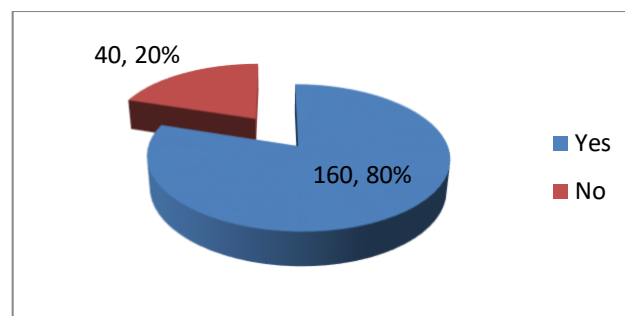
Do you think social media have positive impact on mainstream journalism?



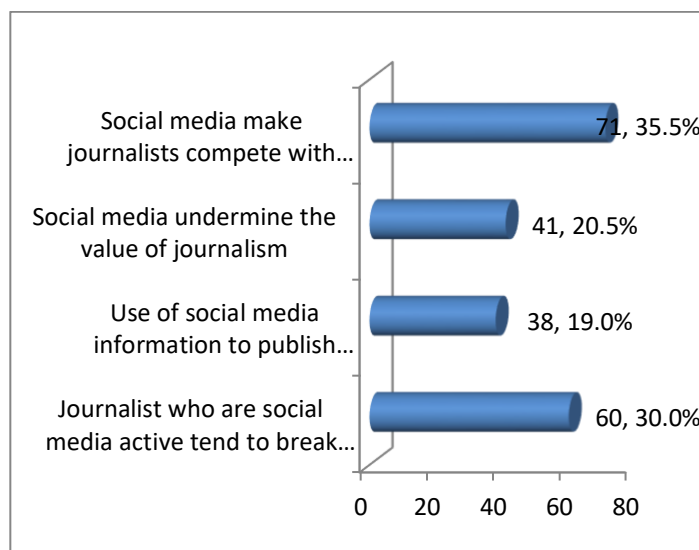
State why you think social media have positive impact on mainstream journalism



Do you think social media have negative impact on mainstream journalism?



State why you think social media have negative impact on mainstream journalism



First, it was found that each and every one of the 200 journalists, representing 100% of the respondents, claimed to have social media accounts.

Secondly, it was revealed that 161 of the journalists, representing 80.5% of the respondents said that they have Facebook accounts; 18 of them representing 9% of the respondents indicated they have X (Twitter) accounts; 12 of them representing 6% of the respondents said that they have YouTube accounts and 9 of them representing 4.5% of the respondents indicated that they have Instagram accounts.

Thirdly, it was discovered that 182 of the journalists, representing 91% of the respondents, claimed to visit their social media accounts frequently, and 18 of them, representing 9% of the respondents, claimed to do so regularly.

Furthermore, it was established that 180 of the journalists, representing 90% of the respondents, stated that the reason for their preferred social media is because they have wider audience; 11 of them, representing 5.5% of the respondents, said that the reason is because they give journalists more opportunities to connect with news sources; and 4 of them, representing 2% of the respondents, claimed that the reason is because they make them socialize with others.

The survey also found that 26 of the journalists, who represented 13% of the respondents, claimed social media have improved their practice of journalism while 174 journalists, representing 87% of the respondents, said they have done so extremely effectively.

Besides, it was noted that all 200 journalists, representing 100% of the respondents, claimed that they think social media have impact on mainstream journalism.

Next, the study envisaged that 84 of the journalists representing 42% of the respondents said that social media impact the pacing of breaking news; 38 of them representing 18% of the respondents indicated that social media have reinforced the value of audience to the media organizations as news sources; 48 of them representing 24% of the respondents said that social media enable both journalists and citizens to share media and 30 of them representing 15% of the respondents said that social media are transforming the way media are produced, distributed and consumed.

Again, it was established that all the 200 journalists surveyed, representing 100% of the respondents believed that social media have positive impact on mainstream journalism.

Also, it was found that 65 of the journalists representing, 32.5% of the respondents believed that social media have positive impact on mainstream journalism because they are helpful to journalists in multiple reporting assignments; 52 of them representing, 26% of the respondents said that social media have positive impact on mainstream journalism because they help journalists to keep in touch with news sources; 58 of them representing, 29% of the respondents claimed that social

media have positive impact on mainstream journalism because they help journalists discover new music, photos, books films, among others and 25 of them representing, 12.5% of the respondents said that social media have positive impact on mainstream journalism because they help journalists share photos, music and others.

What is more, the study recorded that 160 of the journalists, representing 80% of the respondents said that they believe social media have negative impact on mainstream journalism, and 40 of them, representing 20% of the respondents indicated that they think social media do not have negative impact on mainstream journalism.

Finally, the study showed that 60 of the journalists, representing 30% of the respondents said that social media have negative impact on mainstream journalism because journalists who are social media active tend to break conventional norms of journalism; 71 of them, representing 35.5% of the respondents claimed that social media have negative impact on mainstream journalism because social media make journalists compete with bloggers, citizens, tweeters; 41 of them, representing 20.5% of the respondents indicated that social media have negative impact on mainstream journalism because social media undermine the values of journalism and 38 of them, representing 19% of the respondents believed that social media have negative impact on mainstream journalism because use of social media information to publish stories sometimes cause trouble for journalists.

3.2 Discussion

First and foremost, the finding that 100% respondents admitted having social media accounts should worry everyone, especially those who are concerned that social media may undermine the enormous gains the Ghanaian media have made since the introduction of multi-party democracy in Ghana and the liberalization of the media landscape. Some, however, could counter that the use of social media by journalists should not be a reason for alarm because, in accordance with 20th century journalism practice, journalists must get familiar with social media usage or they will fall behind in their quest for information to serve the public interest.

Second, the finding that Facebook remains one of the most popular social networks despite its influence on journalism rapidly dwindling as its emphasis shifts away from news (The Digital News Report, 2023) is supported by the fact that 80.5% respondents claimed to have Facebook accounts. It might also imply that the majority of journalists use Facebook because it allows them to serve the public interest better than other social media platforms.

Moreover, the finding that 91% of respondents visit their social media accounts frequently strongly supports Newman's (2009) assertion that new online tools like YouTube, Facebook, and X (Twitter) are altering how media is produced, shared and consumed. Whether they realize it or not, journalists' constant use of social media will undoubtedly have an impact on how they practice journalism, whether consciously or unconsciously. As a result, organizations like the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA) and the National Communications Authority (NCA), which are mandated to preserve or enforce sanity in the media sector, should take note of this.

Furthermore, it may be inferred that Ghanaian journalists have embraced social media successfully in the performance of their tasks based on the finding that 87% respondents claimed they (social media) have much improved their journalism practice. However, putting so much reliance or trust in social media can cause them to breach the fundamental tenet of journalism, which is to let the public interest take precedence in the performance of their duties. As a result, there should be a call to action for journalists to refrain from using social media extensively when performing their duties.

In addition, the fact that 100% respondents thought social media have positive impact on mainstream journalism will make it very difficult, if not impossible, to persuade journalists or demand that they limit their use of social media while carrying out their public-service obligations. However, media companies only expand and maximize profit when they can increase their viewers, who can then be sold to advertising for money. As a result, there is a probability that journalists will heed the demand to limit their use of social media if the public begin to cease supporting or

patronizing media organizations because their journalists extensively rely on social media sources to cover news.

Next, the finding that 80% respondents said that they believe social media have negative impact on mainstream journalism seems to challenge the Pew Research Centre's proposition that 1 in 5 of (i.e., 18%) United States journalists claimed that social media have a favourable impact on journalism (pewresearch.org).

Finally, the finding that 30% of respondents believed social media have negative impact on mainstream journalism because social media users tend to deviate from accepted norms of journalism supports Singer's (1996) claim that social media platforms prioritize e-commerce, gossip, and phony identities while ignoring the foundation of the industry and undermining its standards.

IV. CONCLUSION

The study evaluated how social media affect mainstream journalism in Ghana. It was discovered that 100% of the respondents – all of them – said they have social media accounts. It was also shown that the majority of respondents (i.e., 80.5%) claimed to have Facebook accounts, 9% claimed to have X (Twitter) accounts, 6% claimed to have YouTube accounts, and 4.5% claimed to have Instagram accounts.

It was also discovered that 91% of respondents stated they visit their social media accounts extremely frequently, while 9% indicated they do so frequently.

Besides, it was discovered that the majority of respondents (i.e., 90%) stated that the reason for their preferred social media is that they have wider audience; 5.5% stated that the same reason; 2% stated that their preferred social media is more trustworthy and 5.5% stated that the reason for their preferred social media is that they give journalists more opportunities to connect with news sources.

Additionally, according to the survey, 87% of respondents said that social media have significantly improved their profession of journalism, while 13% of respondents, who made up the minority, said the same. It was revealed once more that all respondents (100%) believed social media have impact on mainstream journalism.

Next, according to the study, 42% of respondents believe that social media affect the timing of breaking news; 18% said it has strengthened the value of audiences to media organizations as news sources; 24% said it allows both journalists and citizens to share media; and 15% said it is changing how media are created, shared and consumed. The study also discovered that 100% of respondents thought social media have positive impact on mainstream journalism.

Furthermore, it study found that the majority of respondents (32.5%), claimed that social media have positive influence on mainstream journalism because they aid journalists in their various reporting assignments; 26% claimed that social media have positive influence on mainstream journalism because it helps journalists in staying in touch with news sources; and 29% claimed that social media have positive influence on mainstream journalism because it aids journalists in keeping up with news sources.

In addition, it was noted that the majority of respondents (i.e., 80%) stated that they thought social media have detrimental impact on mainstream journalism, whilst 20% of them stated that they did not.

Finally, the results showed that 30% of the respondents believed that social media have negative impact on mainstream journalism because social media active journalists tend to violate established journalistic norms; 35.5% believed that this was because social media forced journalists to compete with bloggers, citizens, and tweeters; and 20.5% believed that this was because social media caused journalists to break mainstream journalism norms.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Journalists use social media responsibly to maintain the public's trust in the press. Before publishing reports, journalists that rely on social media should double-check their facts. Journalists who use social media frequently yet disregard accepted standards of journalism should stop the practice.

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